

SECOND NESTING RECORD AND NORTHWARD ADVANCE OF THE GREAT-TAILED GRACKLE (*QUISCALUS MEXICANUS*) IN NEVADA

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ABSTRACT.— The second nesting record for the Great-tailed Grackle (*Quiscalus mexicanus*) in Nevada is reported from the central part of the state approximately 240 km north of the previous record. Since 1912 this species has undergone a dramatic northward extension of its previous range in the United States, presumably as a result of increased agricultural irrigation in areas that were previously desert or short-grass prairie.

Range expansion of the Great-tailed Grackle (*Quiscalus mexicanus*) into Nevada is of relatively recent occurrence. Linsdale's surveys of the Nevada avifauna made no mention of the species (Linsdale 1936, 1951). The first published record for Nevada is from April 1973 in southeast Nevada near Las Vegas, Clark Co. (Oberholser and Kincaid 1974). Since then the species has been recorded from several localities in Clark, Lincoln, and Nye counties in the southeastern part of the state (Kingery 1980, 1984) and due north of there in the Ruby Valley area, Elko Co. (Kingery 1978, 1981, 1982, 1984). The first record outside these two areas was recently reported for central Nevada between Tonopah and Austin, Nye Co., during the summer of 1983 (Kingery 1984). Despite this plentitude of observations, there is only one record of nesting by this species in Nevada: a single active nest found in 1980 at Beatty, Nye Co., in southern Nevada (Kingery 1980). In this report we document the second Nevada nesting record for this species approximately 240 km north of the previous nesting record for the state.

During the first week of June 1983, a female Great-tailed Grackle was seen carrying nest material to a small stand of narrowleaf cottonwoods (*Populus angustifolia*) surrounding a shallow pond at Carver's ranch in Carvers, Nye Co., elevation 1715 m. This locality is in Big Smokey Valley approximately midway between Tonopah and Austin and is probably the basis for the observation record reported

by Kingery (1984). In mid-July we observed an adult male, adult female, and a fledgling in the same stand of trees. The area used by the birds is typical of nesting areas for this species: close to water, human habitations, and agricultural land (Skutch 1958). Between 22 May and 15 July 1984, we observed adult male and female grackles at this same location, although we did not ascertain whether they nested there. Our observations were made incidental to a broad ecological analysis of riparian avifaunas of the Toiyabe Range (Dobkin and Wilcox, in press); we have never seen more than a single adult of each sex at the Carver's location at any time.

Prior to 1912 the Great-tailed Grackle ranged only as far north as southern Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona (Oberholser and Kincaid 1974). In recent years this species has expanded its range northward into Colorado (Stepney 1975), Nebraska (Faanes and Norling 1981), Utah (White et al. 1983), California (Small 1974), and Oregon (Littlefield 1983), as well as Nevada. We agree with Littlefield's assessment that the increased introduction of mechanized sprinkler irrigation systems into newly created agricultural areas within former deserts is the most likely factor enabling the Great-tailed Grackle to expand its range northwestward from southern Arizona. The north/south axes of the isolated mountain ranges in the Great Basin provide valley corridors with scattered agricultural "oases" containing suitable nesting habitat for this species. In the coming decade we should expect

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to see increased nesting by Great-tailed Grackles in the area extending from southern Nevada northward to southeastern Oregon.

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